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World

An anthropological examination (part 1)

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Anthropologists often take recourse to the word "world" as if its meaning were self-evident, but the word remains highly ambivalent, often extending its meaning in a perilously polysemic fashion. So, the question of "what world are we engaging?" imposes itself, particularly as it leads to another important question: are there "worlds"? This latter question raises some of the fundamental perplexities that have haunted anthropological theory throughout the past century. In this series of two articles, I propose to abandon the established dichotomy between rather crude forms of realism and equally crude forms of semiotic idealism. I sustain that we cannot discuss world without considering for whom, but that this is fully compatible with single-world ontology if we take into account the role of personhood in the human condition. This first article argues for a single-world ontology and for the centrality of personhood. It explores the implications of a form of minimal realism that best suits the ethnographic gesture, while the second article responds to the question of world-forming, the matter of worldview.

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Anthropologists, historians, and qualitative sociologists often take recourse to the word "world" as if its meaning were self-evident. While, indeed, it might be argued that the broad enterprise of science is nothing but a study of "world," the word remains highly ambivalent, often extending its meaning in a perilously polysemic fashion in the course of any single debate. When we describe some feature of the "world of the Nyakyusa" (Wilson 1951), which differs from that of other peoples, the meaning of the word is rather distant from that given to it by philosophers when they speak of "world-involving sentient activity" (Hutto and Myin 2013: 157); when we oppose "home" to "world" (Jackson 1995); or yet when we talk of "social world," as Bourdieu so often did (e.g., 1991). How do these meanings combine? Is "world" still a useful category for anthropologists?

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Of late, as it happens, the category has been playing a rather crucial role in anthropological debates. Tim Ingold, for instance, predicates one of his seminal arguments with the statement, "people do not import their ideas, plans or mental representations into the world, since the very world . . . is the homeland of their thoughts" (1995: 76, 57–80). Here, we can assume that Ingold means by "world" something akin to Martin Heidegger's "the manifestness of beings as such as a whole" (1995: 304), in short, everything that there is. So, the meaning of the word would differ from a more socially localized one, as in "the world of the Nyakyusa." And yet, that leaves out the main perplexity posed by Ingold's sentence: there being many ways of deciding what there is, which one should his reader adopt?

These perplexities have haunted the social sciences for a very long time. Twentieth-century anthropologists ranged from those who espoused more or less unsophisticated forms of realism to those who adopted semiotic idealisms. On the one hand, for example, Max Gluckman's positivism or Marvin Harris' materialism; on the other, the kind of idealism that Boon and Schneider argued for in the 1970s when they proposed "liberating" kinship as a "cultural semantic field" from "sociofunctional prerequisites" granting it "an autonomous integrity analyzable in its own right" (Boon and Schneider 1974: 814). There is a dichotomic propensity at work in anthropological theory that makes it somehow safer to adopt either one or the other extreme. In mid-century England, this was largely represented by Evans-Pritchard's radical rejection of the Durkheimian positivism of his predecessors in his 1949 Marrett Lecture (1950) and was long instanced in the Oxford versus Cambridge divide. But the dichotomic propensity continued: once again, in the 1980s American postmodernist interpretativism reengaged it and then again, in the 2000s, perspectivism brought back the issue all over again.

Over the decades, as I proceeded with my own ethnographic projects,[1] I could not help but feel that we had to overcome this propensity, as it was both intellectually reductive and ethically unviable. In this series of two articles I attempt to articulate the structure of the concept of world as it is being used in contemporary anthropological debates (cf. Frankfurt 2009: 2). I propose a view concerning world that aims at overcoming the effects of the *all-or-nothing fallacy* that so often dominates anthropological theorization, that is, "the fallacy of reasoning from the fact that there is nothing we might not be wrong about to the conclusion that we might be wrong about everything" (Davidson 2001: 45).

My inquiry in these articles is different from Martin Heidegger's question in his famous lecture course of 1929/30 (1995): "what is world?" My purpose differs in that I aim to lay out the conditions of possibility for the ethnographic gesture. I do not ask about the essence of world or its entities, but about "the world which is present at hand" to the ethnographer, as Heidegger would have put it. Thus, I do not ask "why world?" but "what world are we engaging?"—that world that is permanently a component of all anthropological debate. In these two articles, I will not run through the ethnographic record in order to establish exhaustively how different anthropologists have defined world. Two examples that call forth very diverse terrains will have to suffice. Rather, I attempt to propose an outlook on world that

1. See www.pina-cabral.org for a review of these projects.

allows both for the universalist hopes of the anthropological endeavor and for the particularistic demands of the ethnographic practice.

Again, I concern myself with the world of humans, but this does not mean that I discard or reduce the significance of what Heidegger calls "the comparative examination" (1995: 176–78). In fact, his three theses that a stone has no world, that an animal is poor in world, and that a human is world-forming, help us focus on an important aspect of some of the debates that have been firing the social sciences and humanities of late. In the wake of Bruno Latour, there are many who question not only that humans are the only world-forming agents but also that stones have no world. Vital materialists, such as Jane Bennett (2010), argue convincingly in favor of the need "to undo the conceit that humanity is the sole or ultimate well-spring of agency" (2010: 30). Similarly, William Connolly sustains that we live in an "immanent world of becoming" and thus he decries what he calls "the anthropic exception," that is, the "radical break between humanity and other processes" (2011: 31).

I agree broadly with these thinkers but I still find that Heidegger's theses—while they cannot be taken on board today in the way they were phrased—do outline three broad conditions of differentiation before the world that impose themselves. I find it impossible to follow Jane Bennett's diktat that we must "bracket the question of the human" (2010: ix) for that is precisely what anthropology cannot do. It is hardly a matter of "placing humans at the ontological centre or hierarchical apex" (Bennett 2010: 11) but it is a matter of understanding the specific characteristics of the human condition. To do that we have to engage with the nature of personhood, since only human persons can engage in propositional thinking and, therefore, address the world as world. Ours is not a generic human condition, it is the condition of historically specific persons in ontogeny. World is not only human but it is personal. This calls us to be attentive to the "ambivalent character of the concept of world," the step from which Heidegger starts his questioning (1995: 177ff). That is also, therefore, the essential point of departure to what follows. Much like him, I do not aim to abolish such ambivalence, I just aim to contribute toward its further unveiling.

A minimalist realism

Of late, anthropological theory has been oscillating between two alternative options concerning world-making. There are those who follow a metaphysical path in proposing to reenchant the world, with all of the rhetoric charm that goes with such excesses (Viveiros de Castro 2009; Kohn 2013); there are others, however, such as myself, who have opted to stick to the more pedestrian path of building a scientific analysis of what is to be human in the world, for which you have to assume that all humans share common paths of humanity *and* of animality, and that only within these paths does it make sense to be a social scientist at all. Social analysis is carried out by persons in ontogeny, and it is to be received by persons in ontogeny. Verisimilitude, therefore, is an indispensable feature of all successful sociological or anthropological description, as any social scientist who has had to defend a PhD thesis well knows. And verisimilitude depends on assuming the background of a common human world. This approach is, no doubt, less exciting from a rhetoric point of view because it obliges us to the constant exercise of critical

attention implied in the fact that we are always part of what we observe and that there are insuperable limits to certainty.

As such, I aim to contribute toward developing a realism that is minimalist to the extent that it sees humans as capable of engaging the world in very diverse manners (cf. Lynch 1998). Humans are part of the world and respond to its becoming like the members of other species but they do so in a particular way.[2] Like many animals, we too can only make meaning in a social way, but unlike them we develop propositional (symbolic) thinking. This means that we are capable of contemplating our position vis-à-vis the world. Yet we do so only in as much as we develop personhood (cf. Hutto 2008; Pina-Cabral 2013a).

I agree, therefore, that we cannot discuss world without considering "for whom." But, contrary to the belief of those who succumb to the all-or-nothing fallacy, this minimal realist position is perfectly compatible with a single-world ontology based on a nonrepresentational approach to cognition of the kind espoused by Donald Davidson in his late writings, where he develops further his notion of "anomalous monism" inspired by Spinoza's thought (cf. Davidson 2005: 295–314). Anthropologists would do well to play greater attention to Davidson's interpretivist rereading of W. V. Quine's critique of understanding, for it provides a ready escape route to many of the quandaries concerning mind, knowledge, and belief that have haunted anthropological theory since Evans-Pritchard's days and that were brought to a skeptical paroxysm in Rodney Needham's *Belief, language, and experience* (1972).

Essentially, Davidson's view is that "there are no strictly law-like correlations between phenomena classified as mental and phenomena classified as physical, though mental entities are identical, taken one at a time, with physical entities. In other words, *there is a single ontology*, but more than one way of describing and explaining the items in the ontology" (2004: 121, my emphasis). Taken at its broadest implications, this "anomaly," to use Davidson's clumsy expression, is not exclusive to humans but its effects are potentiated by human propositional (symbolic) thinking. Again, we must steer off our propensity to indulge in the all-or-nothing fallacy: humans are not only social, they are also persons who can appreciate that their own selves are part of the world—to that extent they are world-forming. Thus, for a minimalist realist, the relation between personhood and world is fundamental.

For some, like Connolly, this emphasis on the anomaly is incorrect: "The line between agency and cause is historically linked to Cartesian and Kantian contrasts between human beings invested with the powers of free will and non-human force-fields susceptible to explanation through nonagentic causes. But the powers of self-organization expressed to varying degrees in open systems of different types translate that first disjunction into a matter of degree" (Connolly 2011: 173). One is bound to agree with him concerning intentional forms of thinking, which humans share with other species, but not concerning the possibility to conceive of the person as separate from the world, which is a function of propositional, human-specific thinking (cf. Hutto and Myin 2013).

2. Cf. Davidson: "It may be that not even plants could survive in our world if they did not to some extent react in ways we find similar to events and objects that we find similar. This clearly is true of animals; and of course it becomes more obvious the more like us the animal is" (2001: 202).

I believe that, from such a perspective, we can bypass the all-or-nothing fallacy and the dichotomic propensity of anthropological epistemology, which ontologist idealism again rehashes (e.g., Holbraad 2010) and develop the bases for *a truly ecumenist anthropological theory*, that is, one that works toward a common anthropological field of debate, one which all humans can access should they so desire.

The word

Today, the more general acceptation of the word "world," is "what exists," that is, everything. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, however, the main reference is to the planet Earth. The etymological root of the word lies in the Old English word *woruld*, meaning "human existence, the affairs of life"; itself derived from the Proto-Germanic **weraldiz,* a combination of the words for "man," (**veraz*; related to Latin *vir*) and "age" (**aldiz*, meaning age, generation), thus, implying "the age of man." Furthermore, it would seem that both the Latin *mundus* and the Greek *kosmos* bore etymologically connotations of order, cleanliness, and neatness.

It is important to realize that the etymological connotations we have just briefly outlined have not lost their relevance. For example, when people claim that the most pressing problem of our time is humanity's relation to a world that can no longer be taken as infinitely robust and inexhaustible, what meaning are they placing on the word? In this context, the limited meaning of planet Earth is not sufficient by any means but the meaning "all that exists" is also not the point. On the other hand, the further implications that emerge from the etymology, concerning humanity's dwelling place and an ordered context for human habitation, are decidedly at stake. There are lessons to be learned from the word's polysemy and, as we will see in this article, it will eventually turn out to be impossible to cast it aside.

However, due to the importance of the legacy of Christianity in the development of the scientific tradition in Western Europe, the word has absorbed into itself the theory of man's fallen condition. As such, the world—that which presently exists—has come to be opposed to that which is to come: Christ's second coming. This range of meanings is condensed in the notion of *mundane*; a notion that conjoins in a millenarian fashion two very separate but metonymically related meanings: (a) the everyday humdrum existence and (b) that which is not divine, spiritual, heavenly, and is therefore assumed to be shallow, false, doubtful, even irregular (as when, in French, a prostitute is called *une mondaine*). The conjoining of the two carries within itself a world-denying implication that facilitates the dualist strains in European thinking (anthropology included) and is best represented by Descartes' radical philosophical restart—his *cogito ergo sum* declaration—that is so fundamental to the development of the modern scientific tradition. A somewhat different type of dualism concerning the deception of the senses also plays a central role in the Buddhist traditions and has remained globally very influential. In fact, historically, it constituted a major source of tension with China's Confucian tradition, which is probably the least world-denying of the major philosophical traditions.

Therefore, for contemporary anthropologists, after the profound epistemological changes that took place in mid-twentieth-century philosophy, the best way of going about discovering what is world, is surely to see how it presents itself in

people's historically situated lives. Note, I did not say, "what meaning the word has for the people we study," as anthropologists are prone to put it, for that is only part of the issue. I am, therefore, performing a little slide in meaning that I believe I should not silence. If I agree with Davidson and the late Wittgenstein that triangulation with the world is an indispensible component of all acts of human communication, then my suggestion that we should research world cannot be limited to the collecting of the meanings of the word "world," the category "world," or even less the belief "world." I argue that world exists and is immanent (in the sense of imposing itself, cf. Connolly 2011), so world is anterior to language and is a condition for it, both ontogenetically and phylogenetically.[3] Thus, "the accessibility of beings" (cf. Heidegger 1995: 269) is an intrinsic condition of all human communication, including when the latter deals with world, such as our present communication.

We are bound to cast aside the dualist suspicions concerning the world's reality that characterized both the Christian and the Buddhist traditions, and which were based on a systematic distrust of the senses, for they were victims of the all-or-nothing fallacy. So, we follow Davidson in claiming that, "If words and thoughts are, in the most basic cases, necessarily about the sorts of objects and events that commonly cause them, there is no room for Cartesian doubts about the independent existence of such objects and events" (2001: 45). If, in this way, we reject the duality between scheme and content (which we will discuss in the latter part of this article), then all our communication is based on an always-anterior existence of world.[4] Therefore, inspired by Hannah Arendt (1958: 233), we must make an effort never to abstract from history: *irreversibility* and *unpredictability* are constitutive aspects of the human condition in this world of becoming.

Person and world

For an anthropologist, to study the varied ways in which humans inhabit the world (the ways they are "at home in the world") is to study the particular conditions of our humanity. So, when anthropologists focus on cohabiting, we are speaking of specific human persons who encounter each other jointly in spaces that are common to the extent that they are historically specific, that is, spaces that carry a history of sociality within which the particular ontogenesis of each participant of the company was shaped.[5] There is no sociality without persons; we are pressed to avoid the twentieth-century proneness to consider sociality in an abstracted way, as something that exists beyond personhood (in terms of the species or of groupness). Furthermore, embodiment as persons is a condition for all sociality. As George

3. Cf. Ingold: "History is but the continuation of an evolutionary process by another name" (1995: 77).

4. Cf. Davidson: "We do not first form concepts and then discover what they apply to; rather, in the basic cases, the application determines the content of the concept" (2001: 196).

5. I find Ingold's "dwelling perspective" an interesting formulation of what may be involved here (1995: 75–77).

Lakoff and Mark Johnson have argued for category formation (1999), and Rodney Needham discovered for duality (1987), our own body experience (of containment and of handedness, respectively) is constitutive of our most basic mental processes.

Moreover, inhabiting the world as humans is not only to be of the world or to be directed at the world, as in the philosophical meaning of the word *intentionality*. For humans, inhabiting the world is confronting the world formatively, in the sense of thinking *propositionally*. I take recourse here to the distinction that Daniel Hutto sets up between intentional thinking, which humans share with other species ("basic mind"), and propositional thinking in language, which is specific to humans ("scaffolded mind").[6] Humans inhabit the world in both intentional and propositional ways. That means that humans as persons are in permanent ontogenesis, that is, they work reflexively at the fabrication of their own singularity. But note that I am not limiting propositional thought to the boundaries of "conscious/linguistic" thinking, an error that has persecuted anthropological theory since the days of Marcel Mauss. The world feeds back our ontogenetic actions in ways that we had not foreseen—the notion of "scaffolding of mind" is, in this way, usefully evocative.

Two important corollaries can be taken from this: first, we are subject to the *indeterminacy of interpretation*, that is, no meaning will ever be fixed or permanently determinable; second, we are subject to *underdetermination*, that is, there will never be certainty in knowing. This is what Davidson meant when he claimed that he was a "monist" (there is one single ontology) but that his monism was "anomalous," for the world will ever remain indeterminate and underdetermined, that is, it will remain historically diverse.

The person is born as a member of the human species but is not born fully human, as it is only in the course of ontogenesis that the person enters into humanity. We are neurologically equipped with a propensity to enter the world of human communication and to remain within it through memory (Pina-Cabral 2013b). But in order to enter into the world of human communication (to acquire a scaffolded mind), we have to be enticed into humanity by other humans who had already been enticed by others before them, and so on and so forth back to the gradual and discrete origins of the human species.

As Daniel Hutto has argued, "nonverbal responding, quite generally, only involves the having of intentional—but not propositional—attitudes" (2008: xiii). This is something that remains as part of us for our whole lives. But, over that, through the immersion in the complex communicational environments of early ontogeny and the relations of mutuality through which carers capture and are captured by children (dwelling in company), young humans develop propositional thinking. The central propositional attitudes of belief and desire can only be acquired by participating in what Hutto calls "unscripted conversational exchanges" (2008: 136). It

6. Cf. Hutto and Myin: "The very possibility of conceptual meaning, even in the case of phenomenality, requires an inter-subjective space. Acknowledging this entails no denial of the existence of nonconceptual, noncontentful experiences with phenomenal properties associated with basic minds. . . . Our facility with concepts about such experiences is parasitic on a more basic literacy in making ordinary claims about public, worldly items. . . . The acquisition of such conceptual abilities depends on being able to have and share basic experiences with others" (2013: 173).

is by participating in complex communicational contexts where viewpoints clash and where we are subject to a series of diverse unscripted narratives and explanations (in short, *company*), that we are driven away from infant solipsism.

In his foundational lecture on the category of the person, Marcel Mauss noted that there never has been "a tribe, a language, where the word 'I—me' . . . has not existed and has failed to express a clearly delineated thing. . . . Apart from the pronouns that languages possess, a great number of them are marked by the usage of numberless positional suffixes which reflect in broad terms the relations that exist in time and space between the speaking subject and the object of which he/she speaks" (1938: 264). While this is true, it must also not be forgotten that pronouns do not all function in the same way. Long ago, Émile Benveniste demonstrated that the first person and the second person pronouns operate differently from the third person pronoun (he/she) in that they are "empty," as he put it: "their role is to provide the instrument for a conversion . . . of language into speech" (1966: 254). While *I* and *you* are positional indicators, *he/she* are substitutes for objects of speech (as in, "Peter ate the apple. *He* loved it."). *I* and *you* are positional, they do not demand a reference external to the speech act; to the contrary, *he/she* stand for something that is external to it.

There is, indeed, a profound truth to this observation, for it has implications in the matter of early personal ontogenesis. We must not assume that there is any anteriority to the first or second persons, for if we did we would be falling into the trap of separating language use (speech) from the historical process of the constitution of the speaking person, both in ontogeny and in phylogeny. We have to understand that the "substitution" that the third person operates, to use Benveniste's terms, is the original process that allows for the constitution of the other two: as we have come to know, subjectivity follows on intersubjectivity, not the other way round (see Trevarthen 1980).

There would be no speech acts if there were no persons to position themselves within them. The third person, in some sense (a very Freudian sense, as it turns out), is the door into language because it is his/her presence that leads the person into selfhood. For there to be a first person ego there has to have been a previous process of differentiation, an ego relatedness. People are called into language from the outside, so the third person is a previous requirement for the use of the other two persons and their respective personal pronouns (cf. Butler 2012). Thus, each human being starts his or her personal ontogenesis—his or her path of being—inside human contagion. We discover our own personal singularity from within intersubjectivity—and this is why the very word "intersubjectivity" is equivocal, since it seems to suggest that subjectivity would be anterior to it, which is not the case.

Singularity and partibility coexist in the human condition, mutually creating and destroying each other (Strathern 1988: 11–14). Meyer Fortes has famously demonstrated that for the Tallensi, it is only after death that a man can fully achieve the status of full personhood ([1973] 1987). As it happens, there is a profound universalist validity to that particular aporia, since it highlights that personhood is a variable, even in contexts where it is not presented as such. As a matter of fact, in the course of personal ontogenesis, each one of us will never be more than an "almost-one," that is, singular but only almost so, because indeterminacy and underdetermination are inescapable conditions of propositional thinking. We can

only think to the extent that we are willing to enter into sociality and that is a communicational process that has to happen in a historically specific location, in a world of becoming. The very idea that it may be possible to inhabit the world in solitude is ludicrous—as Davidson famously put it, "the possibility of thought comes with company" (2001: 88).

As it happens, this is something that my own ethnography of personal naming among secondary school children in Bahia (NE Brazil) strongly confirmed, providing to me an entry into the study of the scaffolding of mind. Children assumed their personal names, played with them, and manipulated them (by means of small adaptations and recontextualisations, erasures, hypocoristics, diminutives, etc. [Pina-Cabral 2013a]). All this happened, however, in a context where their namers and primary carers were present (or had absented themselves with significant implications) and engaged in processes of personal surrogation with them—that is, relations of profound affective mutuality (Pina-Cabral 2013b). The perspectival foci that structured the child's world—self, home, family, nation—emerged from a game of triangulations within an embodied world where new affordances were constantly offering themselves. The children were assessing these within frames that were provided to them by the narrative contexts in which they were immersed, as they learned more about the world and interacted in ever widening circles. Their docility toward the adoption of these frames (together with the hegemonic relations they carried) was a condition for their own coming into personhood. Deep historical recurrences (going way beyond anything the children themselves could consciously formulate) combined with shallow local specificities; engagement with the world at large combined with a deeply felt sense of local closure. They could only revolt (and that they did) to the extent that they had already entered into sociality.

At home in the world

If we want to explore what world can be to humans, then, perhaps the best starting point is to choose an ethnographic study by an anthropologist who has set out to examine just that. My surprise is that since the days of Lévy-Bruhl so few philosophers have chosen to avail themselves of this rich lode of evidence. Out of a number of possible examples, I have chosen to focus on Michael Jackson's phenomenologically inspired study of the Warlpiri Aboriginal people of Australia (1995). Called *At home in the world*, the book is an attempt to theorize the concept of "home" by overcoming the obvious and much-noted sedentarist implications that the concept carries in most contemporary scientific thinking, and that owes a lot to the long-term history of Western Europe (Pina-Cabral 1989). As Jackson puts it in the synopsis of his book, "ours is an era of uprootedness, with fewer and fewer people living out their lives where they are born. At such a time, in such a world, what does it mean to be 'at home'?" (1995, back page). In fact, as he proceeds to explore the ways in which the Warlpiri produce and inhabit what we might choose to call their "home," he is forced to give us a varied and increasingly complex set of suggestions concerning what world is, both to him and to them.

After all, it is not possible to debate "home" without placing it in "world" for two main reasons: one is that home is that which is not world; the other is that home is

perhaps the central feature of any person's world. These two contrasting meanings actually constitute boundary markers for a complex continuum of contexts where the word "world" seems to most of us to come in handy. I insist on this latter aspect, because in fact I believe that Jackson does make a convincing job of it in his book. Furthermore, his insights can be available both to most trained anthropologists and to the Warlpiri themselves, with whom he debated the book before publishing it. His study, therefore, is not out of history; it is very much part of what world is becoming. Much like myself when I worked in coastal Bahia (2012: chap. 9) and like most anthropologists these days, there are no sharp linguistic barriers between Jackson and his subjects. Yes, there are profound linguistic differences that Jackson does indeed explore, but both he and the Warlpiri had a significant take on each other's linguistic universes anterior to their actual (historical) encounter.

I want to use this ethnographic example to show how there are subtle veins of meaning that go from one usage of "world" to another, both creating semantic overlap and inducing difference. They lead us from one aspect to the other, much like a salesman who wants to sell us a car goes through the various aspects of the vehicle without ever losing touch of the notion that *this* is the vehicle that we must want (not just this kind of wheel, or this kind of motor, or this kind of paint, etc.).

So Jackson tells us that "I had learned that for the Warlpiri, as for other Aboriginal people, the world was originally lifeless and featureless. It had been given form, instilled with life, and charged with meaning by totemic ancestors" (1995: 57). Here we meet up with the old paradox of the world-before-the-world: if for the Warlpiri such a world had no meaning, was it world? For the purposes of the present discussion, however, the more relevant aspect is the further question: what is at stake for the Warlpiri when the notion of "world" is used so generically? In this case, from the context, we can assume that Jackson's sentence refers to what we might call a *cosmos*, an environment that embraces humans and reaches beyond their existence. And yet we know that the Warlpiri are aware that there are places in the world where there are no Warlpiri-kind totemic ancestors, so it is legitimate to ask them: who formed the world of non-Warlpiri peoples? In short, a universalist meaning of world (the cosmos) and a localized meaning (a specifically sociocultural meaning, as in "the world of the Nyakyusa") are somehow made to merge as a result of Jackson's ethnographic mediation, both for him and for the Warlpiri.

A few pages earlier, musing about his African experiences among the Kuranko of Sierra Leone, Jackson had told us, "I wondered if any person is ever free to begin anew, to walk out into the world as if for the first time" (1995: 51). Of course, the answer to his question turns out to be negative because all persons are rooted in anteriority and there is no exit from history. But for our present purposes, there is a noteworthy difference between this world and the one of the earlier sentence. Here, "world" is the opposite of "home"; it is the contrasting outside that accounts for the presence of self and home and whose manifestation is the planet Earth and the bodies within it, in their material diversity.

In this case, the "world" in the earlier sense of cosmos is made up of world plus home. In short, another set of meanings emerges that assumes that world is fundamentally perspectival: this second vector of world results from postulating a perspectival "home" or "self" that opposes it. Such a meaning is inscribed in our historically acquired proclivities as anthropologists, due to the role that the notion

of mundanity plays in Christian theology. But there is a case for arguing that home and person are constants of human experience: as Godfrey Lienhardt argued, "one can lay too much one-sided stress on the collectivist orientation of African ideas of the person. . . . The recognition of the importance of an inner, mysterious *individual* activity, comparable to what is meant by speaking in English of 'what goes on inside' a person is attested by many proverbs" (Lienhardt 1985: 145). I chose this example because of Lienhardt's emphasis on "mysterious"—on the evanescent nature of the perspectival center. This meets up with the way Jackson proceeds: "At that moment, sitting there with Zack and Nugget, Pincher and Francine [his partner], I think I knew what it means to be at home in the world. It is to experience a complete consonance between one's own body and the body of the earth. Between self and other. It little matters whether the other is a landscape, a loved one, a house, or an action. Things flow. There seems to be no resistance between oneself and the world. The relationship is all" (1995: 110).

As he experiences a merging of embodiment and propositional thinking, Jackson is forced to qualify world by reference to "the body of the earth" and this is no passing matter, since the groundedness of being is precisely what he is trying to get at in this passage. Person/home are now integrally and materially part of world and this implies cosmic universality again: "In shared bodily needs, in patterns of attachment and loss, in the imperatives of reciprocity, in the *habitus* of the planet, we [that is, all humans] are involved in a common heritage" (1995: 118).

In the wake of Merleau-Ponty, he comes to see that the very possibility of anthropology and ethnography is dependent on this "*habitus* of the planet," not contrary to it. "The possibility of anthropology is born when the other recognizes my humanity, and on the strength of this recognition incorporates me into his world, giving me food and shelter, bestowing upon me a name, placing upon me the same obligations he places upon his own kinsmen and neighbors. I am literally incorporated in his world, and it is on the basis of this incorporation and my reciprocal response to it that I begin to gain a knowledge of that world. Anthropology should never forget that its project unfolds within the universal constraints of hospitality" (Jackson 1995: 119).

There could be no better ethnographic instantiation of what lies behind Davidson's principle of "interpretive charity."[7] And this is why I am surprised that philosophers have not given enough attention to the insights derived from ethnography. Anthropology can go beyond the limits of speculation to point to the actual empirical conditions under which humans produce meaning. Note the way in which Jackson lays out in this sentence the central paths for the possibility of the ethnographic gesture: food, shelter, name, relatedness. Personhood, both in its physical (food, shelter) and its social specificity (name, relatedness) is a boundary condition for world and it is universal in its diversity. So a third vector of meaning of world appears to emerge: one that opposes the visceral groundedness of personhood to

7. The principle of charity "directs the interpreter to translate or interpret so as to read some of his own standards of truth into the patterns of sentences held true by the speaker. The point of the principle is to make the speaker intelligible, since too great deviations from consistency and correctness leave no common ground on which to judge either conformity or difference" (Davidson 2001: 148).

propositional thinking (within language). This conjoining is the quandary that Ingold tries to address in the sentence I quoted earlier: "people do not import their ideas, plans or mental representations into the world, since the very world . . . is the homeland of their thoughts."

In Jackson's engagement with the Warlpiri, then, we witness the various implications of world coming together in a set of three principal vectors of opposition: (i) *the cosmic vector*—the universally embracing cosmos as opposed to the locally conceived culturally-constructed worlds; (ii) *the perspectival vector*—the encompassing world as opposed to the central but evanescent reference point of home or self; (iii) *the propositional vector*—the world as embodied materiality as opposed to propositional thinking.

These three vectors of world manifest themselves in formally distinct manners: (i) wider and vaguer levels of cosmic embracement operate as contexts for more locally defined and more clearly structured worlds; (ii) world encompasses self, home, or *heimat* in such a way as these perspectival positionings both contrast with it and are a constituent part of it; (iii) materiality contains our sense of internal existence (our "arena of presence and action," cf. Johnston 2010) in that it constrains it, preventing its spreading and situating it (see also Lakoff and Johnson's [1999] notion of bodily containment).[8] Embracement, encompassment, and containment are distinct but related processes, and in everyday experience *the three vectors of world* combine in a process of becoming through which world constantly unfurls and multiplies. It is a movement of (i) totality versus singularity; (ii) encompassment versus identification; (iii) exteriority versus interiority, which never stops being vaguely aporic because totality, encompassment, and exteriority never disappear before singularity, identification, and interiority. Even as world becomes worlds, world remains.

Thus, for example, in a sentence like the following by Glenn Bowman writing about Jerusalem as a pilgrimage site, we see the three vectors evolving in such a way that world unfolds into a number of worlds while remaining present as world, in as much as it is the condition of possibility both for the distinct pilgrimages and for the author's ethnographic study of them: "The centrality of the [Biblical] text meant that it was the reference point by which religious Christians judged the world through which they moved, but the proliferation of meanings accreted around it as it variously developed through the historical spread of the Christian faith, meant that the worlds constituted in its terms were very different—even when, as in the case of Holy Land pilgrimages, those worlds were nominally the same" (1991: 100). Other pilgrims too go around those very same streets and react to the very same texts. The sharing of a space and a text imposes itself on the pilgrim at the very moment they are postulating a divergent perspective from pilgrims of other kinds.

8. With hindsight, I can see in this distinction an echo of Heidegger's three moments of occurrence of the *Dasein*: "(1) holding the binding character of things towards us; (2) completion; (3) unveiling the being of beings" (1995: 348). However, it will be nothing more than a loose correspondence, as I feel that our contemporary discovery that there can be intentionality and phenomenal experience that does not involve mental content—representation—may come to alter significantly all of our earlier understandings of being-in-the-world (Hutto and Myin 2013).

The evidence of the embracing world challenges the completeness of the job of ethnic or religious identification. Alterity[9] remains irreducible and identification incomplete.

At this point we must be reminded of Davidson's injunction that there can only be communication between two speakers when they can triangulate it with the world, that is, the "*habitus* of the planet" is a condition of possibility for humans to mutually understand each other (both at the level of person-to-person understanding and at the level of culture-to-culture understanding) but it is also what divides us. Confronted with the desert's unresponsiveness to human presence Jackson experienced a moment of doubt: "In the desert, I had become convinced that it is not in the nature of human consciousness to enter the world of nature. The truth of nature does not participate in the truth of human consciousness" (1995: 116). The reference to the desert here is not a passing one; it is essential to what he is telling us that the desert is a specific environment that shapes human experience. In this momentary confrontation with the desert, the reduction of mind to "consciousness" again calls our attention to the unresolved, aporic aspect of the third vector identified above: human mind (propositional, reflexive mind) and world interpenetrate without ever fully meeting, that is the major implication for anthropology of the theory of the indeterminacy of interpretation (Feleppa 1988). Humans are of the world but they confront the world. "Some balance must be possible between the world into which we are thrown without our asking and the world we imagine we might bring into being by dint of what we say and do" (Jackson 1995: 123). This is what Jackson calls "the existential struggle" and it is the principal object of his book.

When he speaks of "disengaging from the world about us" in order "to be in touch with ourselves" (1995: 123), or when he claims that the sound of traffic outside is "a world away," he is using the more general cosmic implications of the word. But then, speaking of a moment of great personal intensity, he says, "It was not unlike the experience of watching someone you love dying—the same sense of the world falling away, of oneself falling away from the world, and of all one's awareness condensed by pain into a black hole. At such times, the world at large is diminished and loses its hold, eclipsed by the viscerally immediate world of oneself. It is always a shock, going outdoors again after a birth or a death, to find that the world has not changed along with you, that it has gone on unaffected and indifferent" (1995: 135).

Here we find a kind of logical *non sequitur*: "the world falling away from us" is held to be the same as "us falling away from the world." In fact, the error is only apparent, because the "world at large" and the "visceral world" cannot quite come to separate from each other, they are held together by the fact that sociality and intentional thinking are preconditions for propositional (reflexive) thinking. The world embraces to the extent that it places us—not in space, not in time—but in existence. There is, then, something external in world, for there is no way out of world, we are contained by it; but the world is also an openness, as we are recurrently "confronted

9. This article's reviewers argued that Emanuel Lévinas' thought (much as Heidegger's) is too divergent from my guiding inspiration in Donald Davidson's philosophical world for it to be a useful reference. I found, however, that the late thinking of Davidson (2005) was in many ways compatible with Lévinas' use of the concept of "alterity as anterior," which so inspired me in discussing ethical issues (cf. Lévinas 1971).

by the indeterminate relations between words and world" and our condition is not only to inhabit world but also to inhabit language. We are world-forming.

There would then be three angles to world that Jackson is manipulating without ever being willing to separate them, for he sees them as mutually constitutive: (a) *the cosmic world*; (b) the *perspectival world*; and (c) *the propositional world*. The central conclusion we take from our examination, however, is that personhood—the fact that humans are propositionally thinking embodied creatures—is what holds together the complex dynamic between world and worlds.

Globalization

Let us now take another example in Ulf Hannerz's reflections concerning the present situation of anthropology and his own personal trajectory within it. *Anthropology's world: Life in a twenty-first-century discipline* (2010) takes a very different perspective on world from Jackson's book, as it is less concerned with how people studied by anthropologists inhabit world, and more with anthropology as a mode of inhabiting world. The focus is shifted toward the condition of being an anthropologist in a world that is becoming more . . . global. While never referring to Henri Lefebvre's concept of *mondialisation*, Hannerz explores the way in which his condition as an anthropologist in the second half of the twentieth century was affected by this "shift from the nation-state to the world scale," this process by which a new political and economic order emerged that followed on from the nation and the city, imposing new forms of domination, repression, and hegemony (cf. Elden 2004: 232–35).

His was the curiously contradictory life of someone who, never having left his own Swedish academic base (for he retired from the same department where he carried out his undergraduate studies)[10] worked and dialogued with colleagues and informants all over the world and had a worldwide academic impact. However, he notes, his "cosmopolitan" condition, is two-sided: on one side, the worried face of someone who contemplates humanity as a whole and its evolving political turmoil (the scale of the *mondial*); and, on the other side, the happy face of the one who looks out on the fascinating diversity of meanings and meaningful forms in the human world (Hannerz 2010: 93).

There is an affinity between the two faces, he suggests, which is potentiated by anthropology's main challenge, as he sees it, of "making the world transparent." Now, transparency is a project of mediation between the two faces of the cosmopolitan observer: the globalized condition can only remain humanly pleasing to the extent that pluralism survives. "The world of anthropology keeps changing" (2010: 1), he claims: for anthropologists, the global and the cosmopolitan are two manifestations of facing the contradictoriness of world's becoming. We are tempted to refer here to Heidegger's famous dictum: "The world never *is*, but *worlds*." Therefore, as I shall explore in the next article, I am tempted to read Hannerz's transparency as a mode of worlding (cf. Tsing 2011 or Descola 2010).

10. I was privileged to be part of the fascinating retirement symposium that his colleagues organized, which brought out very vividly his lifework and its curiously understated creativity.

In fact, in the very first page of his book, Hannerz outlines the nature of the aporia that confronts him as he looks back at his life as a fieldworker (in Washington DC, the Caribbean, Nigeria, and among international reporters in Jerusalem, Johannesburg, and Tokyo). As it happens, he brings out the same three vectors that emerged from Jackson's study: the *cosmic* vector—"anthropology's world is the wider outside world"; the *perspectival* vector—"anthropology is a social world in itself"; and the *propositional* vector—"it is a world anthropologists are inclined to think of as made up of a multitude of 'fields.'" (Hannerz 2010:1)

As the book evolves, we see him turning time and again to a central quandary concerning the very definition of his discipline. In Sweden, his decision to become an anthropologist in the 1960s had involved a political conviction. That is why he had wanted to carry out research in Nigeria. The period was one of decolonization, and the young Hannerz' burning wish, that turned him into a social scientist, was to understand that process and contribute actively toward it. He saw the internally turned *volkskunde* (folklore) type of academic engagement being carried out in the department next door as dubious and problematic. As he puts it, he wanted to be an "expatriate researcher," not someone turned in onto the historicist preoccupations of a national/nationalist type of research engagement. So the opposition between "away" and "home" fieldwork engagements was formative.

However, as things evolved in the 1980s and 1990s, neocolonialism turned into neoimperialism, and the face that contemplated the global order (the *mondial*) became sadder and sadder. His experiences in Nigeria, when he finally managed to get there, were particularly distressing. At the same time, anthropology's other face also changed radically. There were departments of anthropology in most places where previously anthropologists had been expatriates and a new "anthropology at home" emerged that was as cosmopolitan as his own "away anthropology." It could hardly be classified in the same bag as the earlier nationalist-driven research that he had avoided in the 1960s. By the early twenty-first century, studying international reporters, Hannerz himself was going everywhere, from interviewing a neighbor of his in Stockholm to Washington, Johannesburg, Jerusalem, or Tokyo. Thus, he calls for the need to retain the "awayness" of the anthropology of the past that he most cherishes, by preventing the new cosmopolitan anthropology from becoming at the global level what folklore had been at the national level. His aim is to retain "our part as anthropologists as helpers of a worldwide transparency, as men and women in the middle" (2010: 91).

It is worth confronting here the quotes of two anthropologists of the earlier generation that inspire him. In 1988, Clifford Geertz had declared, "the next necessary thing is to enlarge the possibility of intelligible discourse between people quite different from one another . . . and yet contained in a world where, tumbled as they are into endless connection, it is increasingly difficult to get out of each other's way" (quoted in Hannerz 2010: 88–89). Hannerz then quotes Fei Xiaodong who, in 1992, claimed that people "shaped by different cultures with different attitudes towards life are crowded into a small world in which they must live in complete and absolute interdependence" (quoted in Hannerz 2010: 100).

This sense that, faced with the world's increasing smallness, there is a burning need to build on the world's plurality is what drives his efforts at passing on anthropology to the next century. Between the cosmic and the perspectival dimensions of

world, anthropology would be a kind of propositional mediator that turns interiority into exteriority and vice versa, thus preventing the global order from destroying the conditions for its own cosmopolitanism. Worlding is a task carried out by persons who use the very means that turn them into persons (that is, propositionally thinking beings) into an instrument for the production of ever-wider bird's-eye view effects (cf. Tomasello 2008).

A plurality of worlds

A number of arguments have emerged of late—some more coherent than others—claiming that there are "worlds" or better still that there is "a plurality of ontologies."[11] The simpler form of the argument may be phrased in the following terms:

> Rather than using our own analytical concepts to make sense of a given ethnography (explanation, interpretation), we use the ethnography to rethink our analytical concepts. Rather than asking why the Nuer should think that twins are birds, we should be asking how we need to think of twins and birds (and all their relevant corollaries, such as humanity, siblinghood, animality, flight or what have you) in order to arrive at a position from which the claim that twins are birds no longer registers as an absurdity. What must twins be, what must birds be, et cetera? (Holbraad 2010: 184)

Thus formulated, the argument is immediately unacceptable due to its blatant ahistoricism and to the presupposition that "us" is a geopolitically recognizable vantage point. One must ask the author how he accounts historically for the fact that he reads ethnographies; how Evans-Pritchard actually managed to fall through the trappings of "our" world to enter into "the Nuer world," only to come out again at the end; one must try very hard not to remember that Collingwood's theory of history ([1946] 2005) was quite as influential to Evans-Pritchard's formulations concerning the Nuer as were the Nuer themselves; and, finally, why Nuer ethnography is the author's chosen example.

There are, however, other versions of the argument. These claim that we must "not see ethnography as a kind of translation from one worldview to another," that "all ontologies are 'groundless' in the sense that no one is the True Ontology" (Paleček and Risjord 2013: 10, 16). In their essay, Martin Paleček and Mark Risjord revisit Davidson's injunction that we ought to reject the dualism between scheme and content, attempting to adapt his nonrepresentationism to anthropology

11. Perhaps this is no more than "a certain (and thus unavoidably fading) moment in the recent history of the discipline, where a vaguely defined cohort of mostly Cambridge-associated scholars found it exciting to experiment with the nature of ethnographic description and anthropological theorizing in a certain way," as Morten Pedersen puts it (2012), but if that is so and Martin Holbraad's intention amounts to little more than ironic conservative posturing, then all the theses and books that are monthly being produced in its wake make little sense. I propose that Pedersen's explanations are, in fact, less convincing than the original posture.

(Davidson 1984: 183–98).[12] This is a laudable exercise. Unfortunately, together with most of their colleagues of this inspiration, the authors' use of the word "ontology" depends on a slide in meaning concerning world that bedevils all their successive arguments. Contrary to what the authors believe, the adoption of ontological monism does not imply the claim that one can have access to the one-and-only True Ontology. Ontological monism does not postulate that truth lies beyond the realm of human experience but rather that truth is a foundational feature of thinking: "without the idea of truth we would not be thinking creatures, nor would we understand what it is for someone else to be a thinking creature" (Davidson 2005: 16).

That apart, we have a problem: anthropologists are so used to looking at ethnography as translation, in the old Evans-Pritchardian manner, that we have stopped thinking whether that is really a useful metaphor (cf. Beidelman 1971; Pina-Cabral 1992). What do ethnographers do precisely? Now, skeptical relativism is buried so deep into the tissue of our anthropological language that we find it hard to give an account of ethnography that bypasses the problems raised by representationalist theories of thinking (cf. Chemero 2009). Paleček and Risjord are correct in trying to go beyond this, but they go on to argue that "Davidson's later work can be used to scaffold the inference from a rejection of the scheme-content distinction to a pluralism of ontology" (2013: 16). Yet this is an incorrect assumption: Davidson is absolutely explicit about the fact that there is only one single ontology (there is only one world) and his dialogue with Spinoza at the end of his life is precisely an elaboration on that idea (2005: 295–314). To attempt to salvage the metaphysical nature of Viveiros de Castro's perspectivism (his *Métaphysique cannibale* [2009]) by twisting Davidson's positions is plainly a misguided step.

The discussion, however, cannot simply be left at that. From the indubitable observation that there is evidence for the existence of distinct "webs of interpretation" that apply in different historical contexts, the authors conclude that "ontologies" exist and are incommensurable. According to them, ontologies are "the product of human interpretive interactions with one another and with their environments. These interactions are often very different, constituting different ontologies. They are incommensurable in the sense that no one way of engaging the environment is right or wrong in metaphysical terms" (Paleček and Risjord 2013: 16). I honestly can see no difference between this definition of the word "ontology" and the meaning traditionally attributed to the anthropological concept of "worldview," apart from the fact, of course, that the word "ontology" is tinted with a spirit of idealism (a *métaphysique*) and the word "worldview" is not (because it presumes its own plural, implying that, if there are differing perspectives, then there is one world).

This matter of "incommensurability," in fact, has a very long history, particularly by reference to Thomas S. Khun's argument about scientific revolutions. In his later life, Khun himself took to criticizing the excessively relativist interpretations of his argument (1962, 1983). In his survey of the debate, Philip Kitcher finds that

12. To my mind, to the contrary, Maurice Bloch's refusal to abandon an intellectualist model of mind in his otherwise interesting book on the challenge of cognition reduces its relevance (2012).

Khun's earlier claims of incommensurability were interpreted too literally and that "we can revert to the idea that full communication across the revolutionary divide is possible and that rival claimants can appeal to a shared body of observational evidence" (Kitcher 1982: 690). The conceptual incommensurability that divides scientific paradigms turns out to be just like that which divides languages that are subject to translation—but always only partly due to the limits imposed by the indeterminacy of all communication. Kitcher's reading of the late Khun's take on incommensurability carefully avoids the all-or-nothing fallacy, arguing that most of Khun's readers go too readily to irrationalist conclusions that are essentially conservative and are, in any case, unnecessary in order to interpret the historical evidence presented by scientific revolutions.

In the same line, I espouse Davidson's claim that there are no radically incompatible human worlds because all humans are endowed with the possibility of developing intelligent communication with all other humans (bar exceptional circumstances: e.g., insanity, drunkenness, extreme fear, etc., and I am not limiting myself to linguistic communication). Since all our thinking is based on intentional thinking as much as on propositional thinking, radical ontological breaks are inconceivable. We are historically part of the world. To claim otherwise would be tantamount to saying that ethnography is an impossibility since, in order to learn what other humans think, we first have to engage with them as human and, more than that, as humans cohabiting a recognizable world, as we saw Jackson arguing earlier. Without the triangulation of the world there is no place for communication.[13]

Paleček and Risjord formulate this aspect of Davidson's thought in the following terms: "Insofar as we are not able to separate our knowledge of the object from the object itself, we are not able to separate our knowledge of ourselves from the knowledge of others. The interpreter becomes a crucial aspect of what it means to have thoughts" (2013: 12). From this, then, they proceed: "The ethnographer is engaging not just an individual in one-on-one communication but a whole interpretive community" (14). Surely that is an important point—quite as important as its symmetrical point: the critique of *ethnographic exceptionalism*. That is, in engaging the ethnographer, the peoples of the world that were being subjected to imperialism throughout the modern era, were not only engaging an individual in a one-on-one communication, but were engaging the full force of imperial globalization.

Now, it would seem that, if there are "interpretive communities," there are "worldviews," that is, that which differentiate interpretive communities in face of others. Of course, it may well be argued that these should not be seen as "views," for that would be to cede to representationism and to an unjustifiably strong form of realism. Philippe Descola has recently produced a formulation of our relation to world where he tries to argue just this (to have the cake and eat it, so to speak).

13. I insist, there is in this argument no claim that the borders of humanity with other animals are precise nor that human proneness to communication cannot elicit forms of communication with animals that often approach interhuman communication. As Heidegger would have it, intentional thinking in both humans and animals presupposes world, but a poor world (1995).

He adopts a kind of minimalist realism such as I have been defending in my own writings since the early 2000s, but then he appends to it a critique of the notion of worldview:

> There can be no multiple worlds because it is highly probable that the potential qualities and relations afforded to human cognition and enactment are the same everywhere until some have been detected and actualized, others ignored. But once this worlding process has been achieved, the result is not a world-view, i.e., one version among others of the same transcendental reality; the result is a world in its own right, a system of partially actualized properties, saturated with meaning and replete with agency, but partially overlapping with other similar systems that have been differently actualized and instituted by different persons. (Descola 2010: 339)

Here, Descola is right concerning the minimal realism but is wrong concerning the worldview issue, since he is unwittingly engaging in the all-or-nothing fallacy again. He is assuming (à la Paleček and Risjord) that the alternative to a multiple ontologies posture is a one-and-only True Ontology posture. His option of denying that when humans share worldviews they are essentially engaging a historically common world is ahistoricist and feeds into the primitivist strain in anthropological thinking that engages in what Hammel long ago used to criticize as "one-village-one-vote comparativism" (1984: 29–43). Furthermore, there is human exclusivism in this, because it is reducing world to propositional thinking (and to conscious categorical thinking at that). But world in humans is grounded in the sort of intentional thinking that we share with animals; scaffolded thinking only comes after and above that and, as we have argued already, it is in any case rooted in our common human embodiment. Too many decades of unchallenged interpretativism have led anthropologists to assume implicitly that thought is primarily systemic in a culturalist sort of way and, therefore, that there are "worlds."

But the ethnographer in the field is not engaging an interpretive community, she is engaging singular humans or, if we want to see it in time, a number of singular persons. Now that is of the essence, for it is due to her human sense of coresponsibility (her proneness to shared intentionality—cf. Tomasello 2008) that the ethnographer can achieve communication through interpretive charity, never through any sort of person-to-group communication. In short, I may communicate with a number of different persons at the same time, but I can only communicate with them because they are singular humans (persons in ontogenesis) like me. To forget that is to allow ourselves to slip back into Durkheimian sociocentrism or worse.

Therefore, we are here faced with another version of the quandary that the anthropology of kinship has been intensely addressing for a number of years:[14] there is a constant dynamic oscillation between singularity and duality in the construction of the dividual person. The unquestioned use of the word "individual" by authors such as Paleček and Risjord actually carries implications of which they

14. See Marriott 1976; Strathern 1988; Sahlins 2011a, 2011b; Pina-Cabral 2013a and 2013b.

might not be aware, for it assumes too casually the unitariness of personhood.[15] That unitariness is precisely what gives credence to ethnographic exceptionalism (that is, the image of the lone ethnographer faced with the whole of the tribe in front of her tape recorder and then coming back to "us" speaking out the words of the "tribe" and not of the persons in it—explaining why twins can be birds or why blood is beer to jaguars, to use the more tired examples). But what we have learned from the long history of the debate about personhood and kinship is that singularity and plurality imply each other in relations of mutuality (Strathern 1988: 11–14; Pina-Cabral 2013b). Therefore, the ethnographer who is carrying out her task is permanently oscillating between plurality and singularity in a process of ontogeny—she can only access interpretive communities because she engages singular communicators and she can only engage the latter because she is willing to enter into their interpretive communities. Again, we are faced with the hegemonic strength of the all-or-nothing fallacy. There is no matter of True Ontology as much as there is no matter in denying the veridicality of all ontologies. The notion of a truth that can exist outside of human interaction in history is absurd. Truth is a feature of mind and "mind is a function of the whole person constituted over time in intersubjective relations with others in the environing world" (Toren 2002: 122).

Thus, yes, there is only one world but, yes, there are interpretive communities. If these were truly incommensurable then there would be no ethnography. But the contrary is also the case: as no communication can happen outside the indeterminacy of meaning, the question of commensurability is always relative from the start and cannot ever be anything but relative.

Conclusion

Having examined the way in which the word "world" is used by anthropologists, I conclude that the meanings attributed to it reflect a basic tension between being *of the world* and being *in the world*. In turn, this tension operates along three basic vectors: for each embodied person, (iii) the world in its materiality opposes itself to propositional thinking due to (ii) the constant constitution of perspectival centers (home/self); in turn, the evanescent nature of these centers allows for (i) a constant play between the world as an embracing cosmos and the world as a locally produced context. Personhood (propositionally thinking human beings historically engaged in sociality) is what allows for the three vectors of polarization to come together in a broad category of world.

The world is one because, in personhood, alterity is anterior; as phenomenology has taught us, human experience is social before it is rational. The world, in all of its plurality, cannot escape from history; all those untold historical determinations that accumulate in the single act of any singular person. There is freedom in personhood to the extent that propositional thought institutes its own processes

15. An aspect that Maurice Bloch's "blob" unfortunately also does not manage to bypass (2012).

of determination that accumulate over material determination; because of what Davidson called "the anomaly."

World, therefore, like persons, will ever waver in the unstable terrain that lies between singularity and plurality; it is one and it is many. In part 2 of this article I will examine what are the structural conditions of world and how ethnography may best approach them in the light of the transcendentalist strains that have ever accompanied anthropology since it became an academic discipline.

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Monde: Une exploration anthropologique.

Résumé : Les anthropologues ont souvent recours au mot « monde » comme si son sens allait de soi. Le mot reste cependant très ambivalent, et sa signification dangereusement polysémique. « Quel monde ? » doit-on se demander, ce qui mène à une autre question importante: y a-t-il« des mondes » ? Cette interrogation nous oblige à confronter certaines des perplexités fondamentales qui ont hanté la théorie anthropologique tout au long du siècle dernier. Dans cet article en deux parties, je propose d'abandonner la dichotomie établie entre les formes assez grossières de réalisme matérialiste et les formes tout aussi rudimentaires d'idéalisme sémiotique. Je soutiens que nous ne pouvons pas discuter du monde sans tenir compte du « pour qui », mais que cela est compatible avec l'ontologie d'un monde unique si l'on prend en compte le rôle de la personnalité dans la condition humaine. Le premier article plaide pour une ontologie du monde unique et la centralité de la personne. Il explore les implications d'une forme de réalisme minimal qui convient mieux à la posture ethnographique, tandis que le deuxième article répondra à la question de la formation du monde, et de la vision du monde.

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